

# THE BAPTIST Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION

131:50  
MS

ID SINCE 1877  
BER 20, 2007  
VOL. 131  
No. 50



MISSISSIPPI  
BAPTISTS

## No Record on Dec. 27

Due to postal regulations that limit The Baptist Record to 50 issues per year, the newspaper will not publish on December 27. The next issue of The Baptist Record will be dated January 3. The staff of The Baptist Record thank you for your support throughout 2007, and wishes for you and your family a joyous celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior and a Happy New Year.

## Miss. Baptists join winter storm response

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP and local reports) — Mississippi Baptist chain saw teams joined disaster relief feeding units and other chainsaw teams from across the Southern Baptist Convention to assist victims of one of the largest U.S. winter storms on record.

At least 22 deaths had been blamed on the storm. States of emergency were declared in Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma, as the storm made its way across the Plains and Midwest states and headed for the Northeast.

Chain saw teams from First Church, Raymond; Covington/Jefferson Davis Association; Poplar Springs Drive Church, Meridian; and a combined team from Calhoun and Yalobusha Associations are being dispatched from a staging area in Jefferson City, Mo., according to Jim Didlake, Men's Ministry director for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) and disaster relief coordinator for MBCB.

About 20 Mississippi Baptists are known to be participating in the relief effort in Missouri, Didlake said.

More than 500,000 customers were without electricity in Oklahoma since Monday, when trees began snapping under the weight of the ice, bringing down power lines. The offices of the Missouri Baptist Convention in Jefferson City were closed because of the ice.

Officials at Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) in Shawnee did not cancel classes, and students were asked to use caution as they made their way to campus for final exams. The university expected to lose several trees to the ice storm, which reminded longtime residents of a similar disaster in 1979 that claimed 100 trees.

"It's the biggest loss since that storm," Johnny Cullison, OBU's administrator emeritus, who worked at the university from 1970 until he retired in 2003, said of the current situation, according to the school's website.

"It is hard to realize how severely some will have to be pruned," Cullison said. "They are losing 20-25 years of growth."

Oklahoma Baptist disaster relief kitchens operating from First Church in Sapulpa and Arrow Heights Church in Broken Arrow were supplying meals for 17 Red Cross shelters in Tulsa and Miami, reported Sam Porter, Oklahoma's disaster relief coordinator.

In Oklahoma City, a feeding unit at Trinity International Church was supplying three shelters in the city, and First Church in Chandler and First Church in Drumright were serving as shelters for residents with no electricity to heat their homes.

By the end of the day Tuesday, the state convention expected all kitchen facilities to be accompanied by disaster relief chaplains.

Porter has requested that 10 out-of-state chainsaw teams deploy to Oklahoma City and 10 to Tulsa to help with the emergency cleanup of downed trees. Those 20 units would join the eight Oklahoma chainsaw crews already activated, Porter said.

The teams will focus on highways, city streets, homes and cars that are covered with trees and limbs, he said.

First Church in Tulsa housed 270 people during the night of Dec. 10, according to Deron Spoo, the church's pastor.



**FROZEN CAMPUS** — Ice-coated trees sagged on the campus of Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee after an ice storm hit the region Dec. 10. Classes were not cancelled, but the university expected to lose several trees to the storm. Mississippi Baptist chain saw crews are in Missouri, which was also hit hard by the history-making winter storm. (BP photo by William B. Pope)

"Walking through this morning, there are quite a few families with little kids, and that breaks your heart to see that happening," Spoo told Baptist Press.

The downtown church is serving as a Red Cross shelter, as they've done during previous ice storms.

"By virtue of our power lines being underground, we're still up and running, and I think it would be wrong not to use our facility," Spoo said, adding that his family didn't have electricity at their home.

"We do have a small gas fireplace, so we all huddled in front of that last night and did just fine," he said.

Spoo said the overall demeanor of the people seeking shelter at First Baptist Tulsa, including some stranded Greyhound bus passengers, was positive.

"More than one person this morning thanked me profusely for using our facilities. There's a wonderful sense of gratitude," he said. "I think people are just happy to be out of the cold."

"I talked with one gentleman this morning who thought he was going to tough it out in his house, but he said, 'There's no way I could get warm last night. I could not get warm for anything,'" Spoo recounted. "He was walking in this morning, rain-drenched as well. We got him some breakfast, got him some hot coffee, and he warmed up. That's worth a lot to him and to us to be able to do that."

The church runs devotional spots on local television stations, and Spoo said several evacuees indicated they recognized the church from the commercials.

"So they know why we're here, and a lot of the people coming in are already believers," he said. "I've talked with a few

believers, and they said, 'This is what the love of Christ is all about.' So they are picking up on that."

As he drove to the church Tuesday morning, Spoo said he thought of Matthew 5:14, where Jesus said, "You are the light of the world."

"That takes on new meaning when 400,000 people are without power and without lights," Spoo said. "The church can be a very simple expression of the love of Christ in a dire situation."

Terry Henderson, national disaster relief director with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention in Alpharetta, Ga., told Baptist Press he expected Missouri to activate emergency response teams as soon as road conditions allowed.

"Supposedly they've gotten hit pretty hard. They've been closed for two days," Henderson said Tuesday morning. "Their state director, Danny Decker, told me from his cell phone yesterday that they can't get their units out because there's so much ice."

Didlake said another team from Calhoun Association will be rotating into the Jefferson City staging area before Christmas.

"We expect all the Mississippi teams to be home for Christmas," he said.

The Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief ministry is supported by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program and the Margaret Lackey State Mission Offering. For more information on the ministry, contact the MBCB Men's Ministry Department at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3334 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 334. E-mail: cwright@mbcb.org.



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BAPTIST RECORD, P.O. Box 530,  
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Send news, communication, and  
address changes to: The Editor,  
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VOLUME 131 • NUMBER 50  
(ISSN-0005-5778)

Published weekly except weeks of July 4 and Christmas by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 515 Mississippi Street, Jackson, MS 39201. Subscription \$9.35 per year payable in advance. Economy plans available for cooperating Mississippi churches. Periodicals postage paid at Jackson, MS. Member, Association of State Baptist Papers. Deadlines: News items — one calendar week prior to requested publication date. Advertising — two calendar weeks prior to requested publication date. All submissions are subject to editing.

# The Light in the storm

**T**his issue of The Baptist Record closes out yet another extraordinary year in the annals of Mississippi Baptist life, and life in general. Events have transpired in 2007 that we could not have possibly anticipated in the last few days of 2006.

Yes, 2007 has been an eventful year. Life has many ways of surprising us — and shocking us. It seems appropriate to be celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior in the midst of all the world's turmoil and tragedy and anxious anticipation for the future, for it is into just such an environment that He came to offer the peace for which the world even today so desperately yearns.

It is supremely sad that the answer to that yearning continues to be rejected in modern times as it was two millennia ago, for He is as willing today as ever to help us (Rev. 3:20). We need only ask Him.

Instead, we stubbornly seek to find our own way. To acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is to submit to His will for our lives, and we don't want to even think about

that. We want what we want, and we want it now.

Whether it's a second ice cream cone or the destruction of human life in the womb, we want everything our way. Too often, we believe ourselves to be in charge of our own destiny.

No wonder the human race is in such a mess. As earthly parents are apt to do on a frequent basis, our Heavenly Father has every right to ask, "Didn't I tell you the right way to do this? Didn't I show you the way? Why won't you listen to me?"

The story is told of a farmer who looked outside his bedroom window one bitterly cold evening and spied a flock of disorient-



ed birds in his yard, dying in the huge winter storm that was blowing through the area. He decided he had to save them.

Braving the howling wind and blinding snow, he managed to open the doors to his spacious, warm barn — but the birds could

not comprehend what the kind farmer had done for them. None of them moved.

The farmer got in front of them and tried to lead them into the barn, but they didn't follow. He got behind them and tried to shoo them into the barn, but they only scattered. He shouted at them and waved his arms, but that only made matters worse.

Nothing seemed to help, but then he had an idea. He raced back to the barn and turned on the large, bright light inside. Within a few seconds, a couple of the birds found their way to the light and the safety of the barn. Within a few minutes, more of the birds had reached shelter.

To the farmer's dismay, however, the remainder of the flock stayed right where they were. Trusting their own instincts in the midst of grave danger, they shunned the life-saving light in the barn until it was too late. They died an agonizing death in the snow.

So it is with God and His plans for us. In the midst of our earthly confusion and turmoil He opened wide the doors of heaven, but we didn't rush in. He tried to lead us, but we didn't follow. Somehow, we missed all the signals of his concern for us until He turned on the Light (John 8:12).

Christians have seen that Light, and have been saved. Many more people have not seen that Light, though, and will die an agonizing eternal death not understanding the meaning of the Light offered to them by God.

Can you think of a better present for Jesus' birthday than to show as many people as possible the way to the Light? Without that Light, there is no hope for the lost people of this world. They cannot find their way on their own, yet don't understand the meaning of the Light. Leading them to the Light is a big responsibility (Matt. 28:18-20), but that is what our Lord and Savior has asked us to do.

After what He did for us, it's the least we can do for Him.

## DVD fuels debate over nature, timing of Bethlehem Star

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — The Star of Bethlehem — a natural occurrence or miraculous event?

Rick Larson believes it's not an either/or answer. An attorney and legal professor, Larson has spent the last eight years devoted to showing how he believes astronomical events in the years three and two B.C. fulfill the Bible's description of the star the Magi followed to find the young Jesus.

Having given numerous PowerPoint presentations on the subject at churches, Larson has helped put together a 63-minute DVD called The Star of Bethlehem, detailing with the help of a computer program what he believes the wise men actually saw.

"I have heard objections from clergy who say they don't like what I'm doing because it removes the miraculous," Larson told Baptist Press. "...The reason that is wrong is because if the star was part of the natural order, and our solar system and the universe is like a great clock — mathematically precise and predictable — then that means that the star was a clockwork star, and that of

course means that God built the star into the structure of the solar system in the universe from the beginning of time.

The DVD is a biblical, astronomical and historical presentation combined with a semi-documentary showing how Larson, though doubtful at first, came to believe the star had an astronomical explanation and even, he said, was able to "stop" over Bethlehem.

Larson asserts the Magi, who many scholars believe had an interest in astronomy and even astrology, would have seen the following:

- Jupiter, the king planet, "crowning" Regulus, the king star, in the constellation of Leo the Lion, representing the tribe of Judah — symbolizing that a king was set to be born, Larson said.

The crowning would have involved Jupiter going back and forth across the sky so that over a series of months it would have had a triple conjunction — that is, a close encounter — with Regulus, so as to appear as a "crown." Other signs in the sky would have involved Virgo the Virgin, representing the mother of the king. The Magi would have

seen all this from their home, possibly in modern-day Iraq.

- Jupiter and Venus in conjunction — and appearing as one "star" — toward the west, over Judea. Upon seeing this sign, which would have happened nine months after the original one, the Magi would have left their home and begun their journey, Larson said. It would have been the brightest "star" anyone had seen, he said.

- Jupiter "stopping" over the town of Bethlehem as seen from Jerusalem, where the Magi passed through on their way to see Jesus. This "stopping" would have involved what astronomers call retrograde motion. After seeing Jupiter stop, the Magi would have headed south on the five-mile journey to Bethlehem.

Using his computer program, a popular one called "Starry Night," Larson said Jupiter would have stopped over Bethlehem on Dec. 25, in the year two B.C.

Denny Burk, professor of New Testament at Criswell College in Dallas, said he believes Larson's theory has some problems but applauded him for putting together a "fascinating" DVD.

Among concerns Burk has with Larson's theory is that Larson "goes beyond what the Bible teaches was the symbolic significance of the Bethlehem star," and that Matthew "gives some indications that the Bethlehem star was a miraculous sign" and not a "natural (though unusual) alignment of the stars."

Additionally, Burk said, the "vast majority of scholars" date Herod's death to four B.C., although he said there is a minority viewpoint putting it at one B.C. If Herod died in four B.C., Larson's theory would have a significant problem, since Herod would be dead by the time the Magi arrive.

Larson said he had been wanting to put the DVD together for some time. He gives the presentation at churches throughout the year, particularly around Christmas.

"I wanted to preserve the story so that if I'm not here somebody could stand on my shoulders," he said. "I didn't want the story to die with me. Because the next guy's going to come along and see things I didn't see."

# Cyclone relief hits stride in Bangladesh

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — A Southern Baptist relief worker surveys the damage in a village devastated by Cyclone Sidr just a couple of weeks earlier. It was a poor community even before the 150-mph winds wrecked the houses and salt water killed their rice crop.

"One family beckoned me to come and see their house, or at least where their house was," said Francis Horton, Central and South Asia area director for Baptist Global Response, a Southern Baptist international development and relief organization.

"A dirt foundation was all that was left and the owner told me he didn't know where the wood frame and tin walls were now. A 15-foot wave had taken them. I asked the man how he was rebuilding, who was helping him, and he said, 'We are building our house from dust.' All he had to work with was whatever material and debris he could find lying around."

The death toll from Cyclone Sidr, which struck the coast of Bangladesh on Nov. 15, has topped 3,500 with another 1,000 people still missing, and is expected go higher. The cyclone also wiped out about 95% of the coastal rice crop, the main source of food in many villages.

"Crop destruction is a big problem because the salty water wiped out most of the rice crops, taking away a large portion of this year's income as well as seed for next year's crop," Horton said. "Southern Baptist world hunger and general relief funds are bringing much-needed relief to cyclone survivors and connecting people in need with people who care."

"We are working with local churches in Bangladesh to deliver food, blankets and cooking utensils in some of the hardest-hit villages along the coast. The people we are helping want us to tell Southern Baptists, 'Thank you.'"

The government of Bangladesh and major relief organizations have done an excellent job of delivering food to storm survivors, but the Southern Baptist assessment team discovered that many families had no way to prepare the food because their pots, pans, and cooking utensils had been carried away by the storm, Horton said.

In early December, Southern Baptist relief workers distributed cooking utensils to 1,750 families.

On Dec. 10 and 11, Baptist Global Response workers and their field partners visited two villages where they distributed blankets and food packets containing rice, lentils, salt, sugar, and oil to about 1,100 families, Horton said.

Following that outreach, the team planned to travel farther south to assess the needs in other villages and look at the need for levee repair.

"Two of our team members conducted a distribution in the Kalapara area last week and the folks there expressed that the repair of the levee that had been washed out by Sidr was their biggest need," Horton said. "We will see if that is being addressed and, if not, how we might be able to help."

Baptist Global Response also is exploring the need to help rebuild some of the houses destroyed by the storm, Horton said.

"Habitat for Humanity has designed a house they think will be much stronger in the next cyclone and have received a donation to cover the costs of all materials," he said. "They need partners to provide the organization of labor to get the houses built. We want to see if we can help organize labor, perhaps through a food-for-work project."

Horton and his team anticipated visiting another district at week's end to conduct



**WELCOME RELIEF** — Southern Baptists and their field partners are ministering God's love to thousands of Bangladeshis in the aftermath of Cyclone Sidr, which struck the coast of Bangladesh on Nov. 15 with 150-mph winds and a storm surge that wiped out entire villages and almost all of the rice crop on which families depended. (BP photo courtesy of Baptist Global Response)

another distribution project for about 1,800 families in five villages. All those distributions were to be conducted through local churches. Blankets are urgently needed because many people are not equipped to cope with the cold weather that will set in during January.

A total of \$80,000 has been released for the relief effort, said Jim Brown, stateside director for Baptist Global Response.

"Southern Baptists are able to respond effectively and efficiently to disasters such as this one because of our unique structure," Brown said. "Because we have personnel in most areas of the world and already have a support structure in place, 100% of every donation can be dedicated to the need at hand."

For more information on Baptist Global Response, visit [gobgr.org](http://gobgr.org).

## Christmas opposed

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — The U.S. House of Representatives approved a resolution on Dec. 11 acknowledging the significance of Christmas and Christianity, but nine members vehemently opposed the recognition. The resolution's sponsor expressed astonishment over the "no" votes. Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, said he could not understand how members of Congress could vote against the measure after the House approved without opposition similar resolutions honoring observances of Islam and Hinduism. In addition to the nine members of Congress who voted against the measure, ten representatives voted "present" and 40 did not vote at all on King's resolution. The House had voted 376-0 for an Oct. 2 measure that expressed some of the same sentiments toward Muslims that King's resolution did toward Christians. It also recognized Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. That roll call included 42 members voting "present" and 14 not voting. On Oct. 29, representatives voted 358-0 for a resolution that honored Diwali, the Indian festival of lights that is celebrated by Hindus as well as Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains. The roll call showed eight members voting "present" and 66 not voting. The nine representatives who opposed recognizing Christmas were all Democrats, and seven supported both the Ramadan and Diwali measures. All four Mississippi Congressmen voted in favor of the resolution: Roger Wicker, Chip Pickering, Bennie Thompson, and Gene Taylor.

## Looking back

### 10 years ago

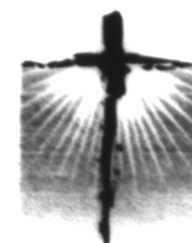
The children's mission groups of First Church, Waynesboro, collect money from different classes and departments in the church to purchase a cow for Jeff Palmer, missionary to the Philippines, as a mission action project.

### 20 years ago

By a vote of 57-54, Jack Harwell is ousted as the editor of the Georgia Baptist Convention's weekly newspaper, The Christian Index, by the convention's executive committee.

### 50 years ago

Reports from 697 Baptist Training Union associations throughout the Southern Baptist Convention indicate that the total attendance of "M" Night will go well above the goal of 450,000.



MISSISSIPPI  
**BAPTISTS**

**THE SECOND  
FRONT PAGE**

PUBLISHED SINCE 1877

DECEMBER 20, 2007

VOL. 131

No. 50

## CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

I no longer make a Christmas wish list. At least I do not make one like when I was a kid growing up. Somewhere along the line in your maturing years you realize that the wish list, if it is to be fulfilled, starts looking more like a work list. Recently a friend called me and in the brightness and lightness of the Holiday Season said, "Is Santa Claus coming to see you this year?" I responded by saying, "No, but I know he is real because he is forever sending me bills." I suppose another thing that affects grown-ups' wishful thinking is that we begin to realize there are so many, many things more important than toys, computers, gadgets, and more stuff to be accumulated. How many people making out a wish list would have things like overcoming a health problem, seeing their child or mate return from the battle zone, wishing they had a home or heat for their home, or enough food on the table? What about the people who will face this Christmas without someone special who is usually there but now is gone?

I remember as a child that we would receive in our home the big Sears & Roebuck Catalog that generally was referred to as the Wish Book. Those were the days before TV or cell phones so we could focus on the catalog and especially the section of toys and spend hours pointing to, picking out, thinking about, and imagining what it would be like to have the items through-

out the book. As I look back on it, this was not a meaningless exercise and there were some good things that came out of the process leading up to the giving and receiving at Christmas time.

We had to prioritize our wish list. It wasn't a matter of picking out three or five things that we wanted to get, but rather we would have to prioritize and decide what we really, really wanted all the way down to what we sort of wanted. It was not an easy exercise, but many years later, I began to realize what a valuable part of life setting your priorities could be. It helps as you go through life with sacrifice, reward, and even the responsibilities that come with some gifts. In ways that can affect you every day as a believer, Jesus taught that we must seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all of these other things in life will be added unto us. In so doing, our Lord taught us that it matters to what or to whom we give our time, energy, love, and devotion. It makes a difference!

There is a second part that became an exercise in our wish list thinking and that was we had to agonize. I am not sure

that this enters into most families today, but we were taught that we probably would not get everything on our list. Sure enough, we did not. So out of our priorities, we would agonize over what we could do without. We did not know it at the time, but we were being taught delayed gratification. Today we want what we want and we want it now.

I so often think of the story that Wayne Oates tells about when he was a young seminary pastor. He would travel on the weekends to his seminary church where he would stay with a family that became his home away from home. When he first went there this fine farm couple told Oates that their home would be his home. Before retiring for the first time, they told him if he woke up during the night and needed anything just to get up and get it. If he needed something and could not find it, to wake them up and they would help him get what he needed. Then they told him if he needed something and they did not have it, they would help him to learn to live without it. What an incredible thing to learn in a world that panics because everything is

not just like they want it. Through the years, I have learned that this exercise in agonizing works in virtually every area of life. If you will just wait, you may receive or sometimes discover that you did not want what you thought you wanted.

One final part of our wish list experience was to *sharitize*. I realize that this is not a word to be found in your spell check, but it was the process that we always were encouraged or at times coerced to participate in. We had to buy things for others. It was an interesting thing because at times, it was not an enjoyable experience to go out and buy for my brothers, but when Christmas arrived, it was always enjoyable to be a part of sharing something with them.

One night recently, I saw a man with a pickup truck filled with what appeared to be Christmas gifts. He was getting out of his truck so I asked him what he was doing with all of the gifts stacked up in the back of his truck. He said that he worked for Deuce McAllister, the New Orleans Saints running back and Mississippi native who played college football at Ole Miss, and that Deuce was sponsoring a group of kids who were not going to have any Christmas gifts because of family circumstances or they were just simply underprivileged with no way to have a Christmas. He and others had spent the day taking these kids shopping, but they were not going just to buy gifts for themselves. In fact, they would take them shopping to pick a gift or gifts for someone else. They had a \$75.00 limit, but when they reached the \$75.00 limit, they received \$25.00 to spend on themselves. So in the days ahead they would enjoy the great blessing of giving while at the same time they could have something to enjoy just for themselves. What a neat idea and what a thoughtful thing for someone to provide the mechanism to allow people to experience giving and receiving and the joy that goes with both.

*Sharitize* is ultimately the best part of the Christmas giving experience as you seek to do something thoughtful, nice, and generous to touch a life. To share with others is a far better experience than for them to share with you. This Christmas I hope you have a wish list that includes and extends far out to bless other lives. As with the first Christmas that is summed up with, "For God so loved the world that He gave," this Christmas is an opportunity to love and give.

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YOU CAN RESPOND  
RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

## MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP MINISTRY

*It's that time of year.*

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS FOR THE 2008-2009 ACADEMIC YEAR WILL BE AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE BEGINNING JANUARY 1, 2008.

VISIT

[www.msmbaptistfoundation.org](http://www.msmbaptistfoundation.org)  
TO COMPLETE YOUR APPLICATION

The Mississippi Baptist Foundation's Scholarship Ministry provides needs-based supplemental financial assistance to Mississippi students who are pursuing a degree at a Mississippi Baptist college or a Southern Baptist seminary. For more information about the MBF Scholarship Ministry, please visit our website, [www.msmbaptistfoundation.org](http://www.msmbaptistfoundation.org). Scholarship applications for the 2008-2009 academic year will be available on our website beginning January 1, 2008. Completed applications must be received in the MBF office by April 30.



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# Analysis: Do Mormons believe the Bible?

Second in a series

By Mike Licona  
Correspondent



Licona

If you ask a Mormon if he believes the Bible he will refer to a Mormon document, The Articles of Faith, verse 8, which says, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God."

Mormons will tell you they believe the Bible "as far as it is translated correctly." Most Christians will agree with that statement. What Mormons will not tell you, unless you ask, is that they do not believe the Bible has been translated correctly but has been corrupted over the years.

Do you remember when your teacher played a game in class? She whispered something in the ear of three students in the front row, who whispered the message into the ear of the students behind them, who in turn whispered into the ear of the students behind them, until the final three students in the back row received the message. Of course all three had something different to repeat.

Mormon thought is if a message can change to that extent in five minutes, we cannot trust a message that has been passed around for 2,000 years! Mormons also claim that the number of different

translations on the market evidences this corruption. If we know what the Bible originally said, why are so many translations available?

While the arguments of Mormons to discredit the reliability of the Bible may seem persuasive on the surface, they collapse when looked at carefully. In this article we will see that the Bible is a reliable document that has been accurately preserved over thousands of years.

## The New Testament

Most, if not all, of the New Testament was originally written in Greek. How do we know that the New Testament which we have today is what was originally written? Let us take a look at the evidence that consists of thousands of ancient manuscripts, ancient versions, and quotations of the New Testament found in the writings of the early Church Fathers.

- **Greek Manuscripts.** Approximately 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament have survived in the original language.

- **Ancient Versions.** By the second century, the New Testament was being translated into different languages. Syriac, Latin, Coptic and other translations provide valuable sources from which to compare.

- **Early Church Fathers.** Within 300 years of Christ, almost 36,000 quotations of the New Testament appear in the writings of the early church fathers. In fact, every verse in the New Testament is quoted but 11 (endnote 6).

What does all of this mean? Let us go back to grade school.

Remember our game? The teacher notes that mistakes occurred while passing around her message. Suppose another teacher goes around to several of those in the middle of each of our three lines and asks them what message they received. Then suppose he interviews others in the lines as well.

After a while he will probably be able to determine where the errors occurred and, by comparing what several of the students say, will be able to come back to a statement, which is very close, if not exact, to what was originally said.

Likewise, although there are variations in the New Testament manuscripts, there are literally tens of thousands of manuscripts from which to do a comparative study. When scholars in the field of textual criticism do comparisons, a text of the New Testament can be produced which is better than 99.5% pure to what the originals said. One of the less than one-half of one percent of what is in question affects any doctrine.

## The Old Testament

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew before the New Testament (between 1,400-400 B.C.). One issue on which Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christians agree is Jesus and His apostles believed that the Old Testament was the inspired, uncorrupted Word of God.

Jesus ministry was dedicated to teaching and fulfilling the Scriptures. When tempted, Jesus

appealed to the Scriptures (Matthew 4:1-11). When answering questions concerning Himself, He appealed to the Scriptures, "It is written ..." (Mark 9:12). At His arrest (Matthew 26:52-56), trial (Matthew 26:64), execution (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:26-31; 23:46), and resurrection (Luke 24:27, 44-46), Jesus appealed to the Scriptures.

Jesus cites one of Moses' statements found in Genesis as if God spoke it (Matthew 19:4-5). His apostles, likewise, viewed the Old Testament Scriptures as the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

Mormons believe that although Jesus and His apostles had God's Word in their hands (i.e., the Old Testament), much of it has since been corrupted. Therefore, is not trustworthy. Is this true? Let us look at the evidence which consists of the Hebrew text which has been passed on for a thousand years known as the Masoretic text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient versions, and Old Testament verses cited in the New Testament.

- **Masoretic Text.** The text of the Old Testament used by translators of the Bible is referred to as the Masoretic text, named after the Masoretes who meticulously copied and edited the text between A.D. 600-1,000.

- **Dead Sea Scrolls.** In 1946, hundreds of scrolls and fragments were found in 11 caves in northern Israel. Texts from every book of the Old

(cont'd on page 8)

## Bibliocipher

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ZBST ULSTSP ZBSAE

XTPSEMZDTPATC, ZBDZ

ZBSQ JACBZ XTPSEMZDTP

ZBS MNEALZXESM.

IXHS ZOSTZQ-VUXE:

VUEZQ-VARS

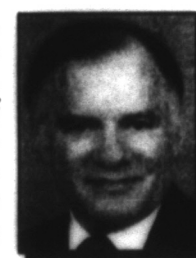
Clue: Z = T

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Acts One: Seven.

## OBITUARIES

Funeral services were held December 7 at Mt. Zion Baptist Church for **Edward Smith** of Newhebron, who died December 5 at age 78. He was ordained as a Baptist Minister on October 12, 1950 and pastored churches in Lawrence, Leake, Newton and Lafayette counties. Survivors include his wife, Kathryn Smith of Newhebron, daughter, Mary Ann Harrison of Laurel, Ray Smith, son, of Tupelo, and daughter, Fay Barnett of Newhebron.

**Charles M. (Chuck) Moody** died unexpectedly Sept. 19 of a massive cerebral hemorrhage. Moody was born in Louisville Oct. 20, 1936, graduated from



Moody

Louisville High School in 1954, and held degrees from Mississippi College and New Orleans Seminary. He served in Marks; First Church, Gulfport; and pastored churches in Crosby, Deltaville, Va., Morton, and was serving Calvary Church, Louisville, at the time of his death. He is survived by his wife Carol Stewart Moody; sons Stephen and wife Carolyn, Stewart and wife Julie; Charlie Moody; two grandchildren, Will and Elizabeth Anne Moody; and sister, Marveen Moody, Louisville.

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## JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Ladies honored for membership, Philadelphia Church, Etta



MISSISSIPPI  
BAPTISTS



5. Brown licensed to ministry, Slayden Church, Lamar



2. Senior Citizens, Pine Grove Church, House

1. Philadelphia Church, Etta, celebrated its 160th birthday Dec. 2 and recognized four ladies who have been members for 70 or more years of continuous membership. Shown are Rosa Heatherly, Geraldine Coffey, Allethia Coffey, and Thea Watts.

2. The senior citizens group from Pine Grove Church, House, visited the Billy Graham Library, the Cove, and Ridgecrest, near Asheville, North Carolina, and attended the Glory Conference Oct. 23-25. Shown are the participants.

3. The Acteens of First Church, New Albany, recently painted chairs for the Sav-A-Life Center in Union County at the Tallahatchie River Fest. Shown are the participants.

4. The children from First Church, Houlika, presented a singing Christmas tree to usher in the holiday season. Shown are the participants.

5. Slayden Church, Lamar, licensed Jeff Brown to the ministry Nov. 11. Shown are pastor David Bishop and Brown.

6. Macedonia Church, Lee County, held a one day VBS July 14, 2 years to 6th grade. Shown are some of the participants.

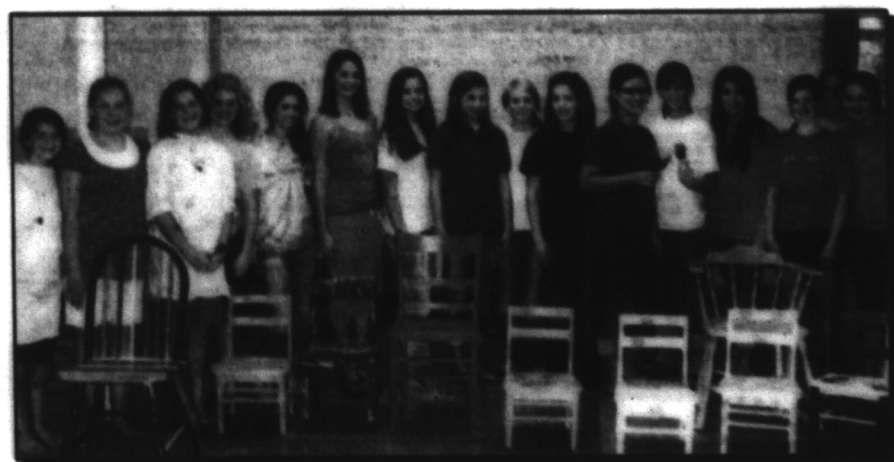
7. Beulah Church, Newton County, recently ordained Mart Murphree as deacon. Shown are pastor Keith Ramage, Graham Murphree, Murphree, Joyce Murphree, and former pastor Bryon Howell.

8. Harmony Church, Walnut, recognized Joel Wooley for 10 years service as minister of music. Shown are Wooley and pastor Brian Tatum.

9. Antioch Church, Quitman, celebrated its sesquicentennial anniversary Oct. 7.



6. VBS, Macedonia Church, Lee County



3. Acteens, First Church, New Albany



7. Deacon ordination, Beulah Church, Newton



4. Singing Christmas Tree, First Church, Houlika



8. Wooley recognized, Harmony Church, Walnut

## JUST FOR THE RECORD



9. Nail honored, Foxworth Church, Foxworth



10. Operation Christmas Child, Holcomb Church, Holcomb



11. 100th Anniversary, Vardaman Church, Kemper County



12. Youth, Mt. Olive Church, Baldwyn

9. **Foxworth Church, Foxworth**, honored pastor Charles Nail for his commitment to the congregation and community Oct. 21. He received a framed calendar signed by each church family member with a promise to pray for him and his family on a certain day each month. Shown is Nail, right.

10. **Holcomb Church, Holcomb**, held a dedication service for Operation Christmas Child Nov. 11, receiving 98 boxes. Shown are some of the children participating.

11. **Vardaman Church, Kemper County**, held its 100th anniversary celebration in September, with several former pastors and supply preachers attending. Shown are former pastors Houston Jarvis, Kermit Sharp, Scott Harrell, Jerry Read, Richard Davis, Wayne Hill, Jessie Napp and current pastor Josh Meadows.

12. The youth of **Mt. Olive Church, Baldwyn**, went to Baldwyn Nursing Home during Thanksgiving break and held a VBS for the residents. Shown are the participants. The youth



13. Deacon ordination, First Church, Ripley

also held a Veteran's Day breakfast to honor veterans and their families, serving approximately 50 people.

13. **First Church, Ripley**, ordained Brad Hill as deacon Nov. 25. Shown are Zak Hill, Jamei Hill, Sarah Hill, and Hill.

14. **Briar Hill Church, Florence**, is hosting a New Year's Eve gospel sing Dec. 31, 7 p.m.-midnight, featur-

ing Spoken 4, Revelations, Gospel Echoes, New Wine Quartet, and Masters Sound Quartet. A love offering will be received.

15. **First Church, Durant**, held a special homecoming service Nov. 4, with former pastors, staff, members, and former members attending. Dan Watts, pastor, preached; David Young led music; and former resident Ed Sudduth was organist.

## COLLEGE NEWS



3. Parks honored, MC

1. Mark Welch has endowed the first ever scholarship for music therapy interns at William Carey University in honor of his wife, Morgan. Morgan Welch died of a rare form of cancer, inflammatory breast cancer, January, 2006.

2. Terry Puckett and his wife, Janet, Wesson, have established a \$50,000 scholarship, the Thomas F. and Margaret Furr Lee Scholarship, for Copiah-Lincoln Community College graduates who transfer to Mississippi College.

3. Sandra Parks, a Mississippi College accounting professor for more than three

decades, will be honored by the Mississippi Society of Certified Public Accountants with its outstanding educator award.

4. Viola Dacus, a Mississippi College music professor, will participate as a solo performer during a Christmas Eve concert in Bethlehem's Manger Square. She will be part of a four-city tour of the Holy Land with several other U.S. musicians.



4. Dacus

## Mormons (cont'd from page 5)

Testament were found, with the lone exception of Esther. Of most importance are two Isaiah scrolls, which are dated between 200 to 50 B.C.

One of them has been wonderfully preserved and contains the book of Isaiah in its entirety. When this text of Isaiah was compared to the book of Isaiah in the Masoretic text, there was nearly a 100% correlation between the two, which indicated that the Hebrew text has been marvelously preserved from a time before Jesus until the present.

- **Ancient Versions.** Two ancient versions are helpful when comparing them to the Hebrew text: the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Septuagint was the Greek translation of the Old Testament used in Jesus' day and is quoted many times by the New Testament writers.

If you were to translate the Septuagint back into Hebrew, the similarity to the Masoretic Text is striking. The Samaritan Pentateuch is the first five books of the Bible which were used by the Samaritans, a group of Jews who permanently separated themselves from the general Jewish population around 500 B.C. Again, the similarities to the Masoretic Text are striking.

- **Old Testament verses in the New Testament.** The writers of the New Testament cite verses from the Old Testament a total of 330 times! (end-note 8). Most of these citations are from the Septuagint. Others are from the Hebrew texts. Once again there is an incredible correlation to the Old Testament that we have today.

How close can we get to a pure text? Approximately 90% of the text of the Old Testament is without any variation,

regardless of the textual tradition. Within the remaining 10%, the variances are insignificant, none of which affect any biblical doctrine.

Most can be eliminated when certain errors are detected: obvious slips of the pen, an inadequate knowledge of the Hebrew language on the part of the translator, partisan thinking, and different dialects. Therefore, when proper textual criticism is conducted, a text with a purity exceeding 95% results. The remaining uncertainties mostly amount to a simple discrepancy in word order.

When the evidence is considered, we can confidently assert that the Bible in our possession today, both the Old and New Testaments, is a pure and trustworthy text we can rely on. Even scholars who do not believe the Bible refuse to levy the charge that the Bible has been corrupted over the years resulting in a text which we cannot be certain of.

The Bible is a text which has been preserved with amazing accuracy, far better than any other work of antiquity.

### What about translations?

We have established that the Hebrew and Greek texts used today by translators are essentially pure to what the originals said. So why are there so many English translations of the Bible? Does this indicate that we cannot be certain what those Hebrew and Greek texts said?

It has been nearly 400 years since the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible was produced. The English language has changed considerably over that period of time. The orthography (i.e., the way a word was written) of 1611 is not readable to most of us today as anyone picking up a KJV from 1611 will immediately find.

Likewise, some spellings and word meanings are different today than 400 years ago. For example, Psalm 5:6 in the King James Version reads, "Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing."

To "speak leasing" today might refer to a consumer going to a car dealership and discussing the leasing of an automobile. However, in Elizabethan English, the term "leasing" meant to lie. Modern translations "update" the language. "You destroy those who speak falsehood" (Ps. 5:6, NASB). "You destroy those who tell lies" (Ps. 5:6, NIV).

English translations also were created to serve different purposes. If you have studied another language, for example French or Spanish, you know that the grammar of one language is different from the grammar of another. Some translations were made for the purpose of being a literal translation (almost a word for word accuracy). The New American Standard Bible is a good example of such a translation.

Other translations were made for the purpose of being accurate but easier to read. The New International Version attempts to maintain accuracy while putting the message of the original Greek and Hebrew in today's English vernacular.

The Living Bible is not a translation but a paraphrase. It attempts to restate the meaning of the verse solely for ease of reading. The New Living Translation seeks to be an accurate translation while promoting a simpler vocabulary. So translations are not necessarily scholars disagreeing with one another, but language updates and different objectives.

The Mormon scriptures affirm that Mormons believe the Bible is the Word of God "as far as it is translated correctly"

(Doctrine and Covenants, Article of Faith 8). Since we can now know with a great deal of certainty what the original text of the Bible says, the linguist can translate the Hebrew and Greek into English.

### Archaeology and history

The Smithsonian Institution's Department of Anthropology has an official statement on "The Bible as History." In it they say, "Much of the Bible, in particular the historical books of the Old Testament, are as accurate historical documents as any that we have from antiquity and are in fact more accurate than many of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, or Greek histories. These biblical records can be, and are, used as are other ancient documents in archeological work. For the most part, historical events described took place and the peoples cited really existed."

The spade of the archaeologist, the pen of ancient non-Christian historians, and tens of thousands of ancient manuscripts provide evidence that the Bible is a volume which is historically reliable and that its text has been preserved in a pure form. In other words, it is trustworthy.

Unfortunately for the Mormon Church, as we shall see in this series, the same cannot be said for their scriptures.

Licona is director of apologetics & interfaith evangelism at the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Alpharetta, Ga. For endnotes and references regarding today's article, visit <http://www.sbcap-tistpress.org/BPnews.asp?ID=27008>. Licona's analysis appears courtesy of Baptist Press. Read additional free articles on Mormonism and related topics at [www.4truth.net](http://www.4truth.net).

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The Baptist Children's Village staff and children  
want to wish all Mississippi Baptists  
a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

For unto you is born this day in the city of  
David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:11 KJV



Charles Renfrow was recently elected to serve as the 2008 President of The Baptist Children's Village Board of Trustees. Renfrow and his wife Charlene are members of Countrywoods Church, Byram, and are long-time friends of The Baptist Children's Village. Pictured (L-R) are Renfrow and Rory Lee, BCV Executive Director.

## BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

### Celebrating the Savior's Birth

Luke 2:4-12, 16-20

By Andy Vaughn

Luke 2:1-20 describes the occurrence of two activities that impacted the celebration of the Savior's birth. The census decree from Caesar Augustus sent Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, while the angel's announcement prepared the shepherds for their celebration of the Savior's birth. The activities that surrounded the birth of Christ had an influence on how He would be celebrated as the Savior.

From Christ's birth to today, people have developed and participated in many different activities that influence their celebration of Christmas. Some people read the Scriptural account of Jesus' birth to their family before opening gifts, while the family across the street opens gifts together in celebration of a day away from work. Another family may grill steaks for Christmas

dinner instead of the traditional baked ham. Yet, another person may miss out on the usual Christmas celebrations because of her work schedule.

No matter where or how we find ourselves on Christmas Day, our celebration of the Savior's birth has been influenced by the activities that surround life. Today, the world offers many activities that compete with the celebration of Christmas. During the Christmas season, people must determine if they will celebrate the "day" or celebrate the "Savior's birth." Consider the question, "How will my Christmas Day be a celebration of Jesus' birth?"

Luke 2:7 (NASB) says, "And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no



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room for them in the inn." The situation Mary and Joseph faced seemed far from ideal for the birth of the Savior. Their obedience to Caesar's decree caused them to travel to Bethlehem while pregnant. Also, they were refused a room in the inn which required

Mary to give birth to the Savior in an environment that was far from clean. Mary and Joseph had to decide to what degree they would allow the activities around them to influence their celebration of the Savior's birth.

God knew exactly what Mary and Joseph faced as they prepared to celebrate the Savior's birth. Micah 5:2 (NASB) states, "But as for you Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler of Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." According to the book of Micah, the Savior's birth would occur in Bethlehem and their travel was a fulfillment of Scripture. Mary and Joseph worked

through the activities of the day that surrounded them and they celebrated the birth of their Son, the Savior. Today, God's word encourages us to work through the hustle and bustle of Christmas while remaining focused on the celebration of Christ as the Savior.

Luke 2:10-11 (NASB) says, "And the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.' God's promise of the Savior had been fulfilled and the angel of the Lord spread the news! Verse 10 describes the good news of the Savior's birth as, "A joy which shall be for all the people." God's announcement of the Savior was intended for all to hear.

Today, the church is challenged with the task of announcing the Savior's birth to all people. Christmas celebrations are not to be exclusive for a few, but must be proactive in reaching out to the world so all people hear the announcement of the Savior's birth.

Churches are encouraged to have outreach programs that spread the Gospel in local communities and to the world through mission programs.

According to verse 15, the birth of the Savior was announced to the shepherds in such a way that they wanted to know more! They wanted to experience firsthand the gift of knowing the Savior and celebrating His birth! Consider the question, "Am I planning activities around Christmas that speak so positively about the Savior that others want to know Him?"

Luke 2:19 (NASB) says, "But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." Mary recognized the value of the Savior's birth and held firmly to Him. Consider this, "How are the activities that surround my daily life impacting the way I celebrate Christmas?" Christians are encouraged through Scripture to plan Christmas activities that clearly announce and celebrate the birth of the Savior!

Vaughn is pastor of First Church, Fulton.

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE

### Accept God's Promised Savior

John 1:1-18

By Melleen Moore

With the bright lights of Christmas appearing across the landscape, I am reminded of a children's song "This Little Light of Mine" which continues "I gonna let it shine." Other verses suggest putting the light under a basket or puffing it out. The light of that little song is Jesus, God's promised Savior. Are we accepting Him as the light of the world?

Identify the Savior,  
John 1:1-5

The spiritual light to all mankind came from God through Jesus, His son. "In Him was life; and the life was the light to men" John 1:4 KJV. Jesus is the light to man — His

salvation. The Gospel of John emphatically states that "In the beginning was the Word," John 1:1 KJV — before time, eternal, no beginning and no end — the Word existed. "The Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1 KJV). He existed and spoke the creation into existence from nothing. We owe our very existence and breathe of life to Him. Even man's refusal to accept Jesus, would not dim the light that God had sent. To John, it was plain and simple the "Word" was the good news of Jesus Christ as He was fully God and fully human. To identify with the divine Creator and Author of life is to accept Jesus as the light of the world.



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Heed the Witness,  
John 1:6-9

John the Baptist could certainly qualify to sing "This Little Light of Mine". His light was shining brightly from the wilderness as he proclaimed the coming Messiah. Witness, light

and believe describe the ministry of John the Baptist. He was sent from God to be a witness of the Light that all through Jesus might believe (John 1:7 KJV). John was a reflection of the Light to come. His ministry was to point to the true Light which was and is available to all who will believe.

Respond with Faith,  
John 1:10-13

The Light comes to all who responded in faith to receive—accept and know Him, to believe on His name. They become the children of God. Having the right or authority to be in the God's Family is a marvelous free gift. "But as many as received

him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12 KJV). The family of God is reserved for those who believe in His name and accept Jesus by faith. Although Jesus lived among men in a world that was created through Him, He was not recognized as the Messiah by all. For the most part, God's chosen people, the lineage of which Jesus was born, did not receive Him. To believe in faith is the sheer joy of knowing, receiving and following Jesus. In Romans 10:17, we are told that faith is by hearing and hearing is by the Word of God. That Word is the Light of the world.

Experience Grace and Truth,  
John 1:14-18

"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 KJV). The gift of grace comes from the light of truth — Jesus Christ. To claim that gift, Jesus must be accepted as the Savior. Matthew and Luke give detailed accounts of Jesus Christ birth, God's only son. He was born in a

manger of the Virgin Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph hearing from God in a dream willingly became Jesus' earthly father. Even the heavens proclaimed His birth in the lowliest of settings surrounded by animals of God's creation. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." (Luke 2:13-14 KJV). The shepherds and wise men came to proclaim His birth and worship Him born King. A brilliant star came to rest in the heavens over where Jesus, the Light of the World, was born. The Law of Moses had pointed to Jesus, Isaiah and the prophets had prophesied of Jesus coming. John the Baptist was His forerunner. All of creation, heaven and earth, knew of this marvelous gift. Would man, God's most intelligent of creation, accept or reject Jesus as the Light of the World?

Moore is a member of Macedonia Church, Petal.

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THE BAPTIST  
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# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

## Bowing Before the Savior

Matthew 2:1-12

By Andy Vaughn

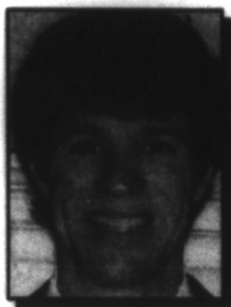
Matthew 2:1-12 is a fascinating section of Scripture that clearly depicts a group of men paying their allegiance to the Savior of the world through worship. These verses of Scripture also speak of a man's attempt to take the focus of worship off of the Savior. In today's society, people are faced with making the decision of who or what they will pay their allegiance to in worship.

This decision is greatly influenced by the priorities of everyday life. For example, the demands of work require more time than ever on an individual's schedule. People are working more and more hours just to keep their head above water, but all too often this increased work load has caused people to spend less time worshipping the Savior.

The average American family has a calendar packed so full of events that they could compete with the lineup of any major television network. Church events, birthday parties, sports, exercise, travel, etc. have infiltrated the free time of a family in such a demanding way that less time than ever is spent worshipping the Savior.

Both work and family are very important parts of the society we live in. In view of these areas people must decide, "Why does Jesus deserve first place in my life?" Deciding who are what will be first place in life also places a tremendous strain on a person's list of priorities.

Matthew 2:2-3 (NASB) says, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we



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saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him. And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." As indicated in these verses, the magi from the east desired to worship the Savior. Notice how this desire to worship the Savior stirred the emotions of Herod the King.

Herod's desire for people to worship him as king was so great that he felt troubled at the thought of any other person being worshiped. Herod definitely had his priorities out of line.

Although Herod's priorities were out of line, he had an opportunity to correct his focus in life as indicated in Scripture. Matthew 2:4-6 teaches that the leaders informed Herod of the Scriptural prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Herod ignored the truth of the Scripture and continued about his own business.

Allowing God's word to impact our life is of utmost

importance. Through His word people can clearly see that Christ is the Savior and that He alone deserves to be worshiped. God's word deserves to be read and studied to insure we have our priorities on the right track as we worship the Savior.

Matthew 2:7 (NASB) says, "Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared." Herod's secret meeting clearly illustrates that he was up to no good. He heard the truth from Scripture of where the Savior was to be born, yet he was actively going against what he knew to be right. Herod refused to shift his priority of worship to the Savior.

Bowing before the Savior in worship requires people to have their priority on Him. The magi demonstrated that their priority was on the Savior as they actively searched for Him. Matthew 2:10 (NASB) says, "And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." The magi held firmly to the truth they had heard from the Scripture of Micah 5:2 that the Savior would be born

in Bethlehem. Having the Savior as their priority brought joy into their lives which was exactly opposite of the desperation Herod felt.

It is through this joy that they were able to worship the Savior as HE deserved to be worshiped. Matthew 2:11 (NASB) says, "And they came into the house and saw the child with Mary His Mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh." The magi bowed before the Savior and worshiped Him as He topped their list of priorities.

Jesus deserves to be first place in the lives of people because He is the Savior, and He alone deserves to be worshiped. Herod refused to worship the Savior and was troubled in life, while the magi worshiped the Savior and experienced joy. Consider the question, "What priorities do I need to shift in my life so I can actively bow before the Savior and worship Him?"

Vaughn is pastor of First Church, Fulton.

# EXPLORE THE BIBLE

## God Offers New Opportunities

Genesis 8, 15-17, 20-22, 9: 1-3, 8-13

By Melleen Moore

The words, Noah's Ark, are a beautiful word picture. Can you not close your eyes and envision a huge boat using the detailed description of God in Genesis. Many words have been used to describe the ark and many drawings and paintings have been made of the ark. However, the most striking description is the simple meaning of the ark, salvation by God of His creation of mankind and animal life — salvation of the second Adam and pointing to the second coming of the Son of God.

### Opportunities to Worship, Genesis 8: 15-17, 20-22

Noah, his family, the animals and fowls had entered the ark as commanded by God. The ark

had come to rest in the Ararat Mountains about five months from the beginning of the flood. But now, Noah waited on the Lord to send him from the ark. After a year aboard the ark, Noah heard God say "Go forth of the ark" (Genesis 8:16 KJV). He was to bring his family and every living creature from the ark. The instructions were to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 8:17 KJV). Noah's first action was seizing the opportunity to build an altar and praise God. According to the scripture in Genesis 7:2, God had commanded Noah to take seven of every clean beast, male and female and two of the unclean, male and female animals. God thought of everything, he planned ahead for Noah to have animals for a



Moore

sacrifice after the flood. In the fresh start of life, Noah put God first in gratitude and worship with the burnt offerings. The term "burnt offerings" lends itself to the meaning of "going up" a whole or complete sacrifice, nothing held back, being dedicated in worship to God. Notice that Noah was not satisfied to offer one sacrifice. He "took of every clean beast, and every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar" (Genesis 8:20 KJV). The sacrifice was pleasing to God as a sweet aroma. This is the same sense of the term "sweet aroma" from Ephesians 5:2 when Christ gave himself for our sins. God accepted the sacrifice and made a new covenant to preserve the earth as never again destroying every living thing from the face of the earth with water. God gave the divine gift of seasons by stating that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and

summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22 KJV).

### Opportunities to Work, Genesis 9: 1-3

With the new beginning, God gave the world a second chance. The blessing of Noah and his family was to populate the earth which produced all peoples and nations. The harmony of God's creation had changed as man continued to sin and new perimeters are set in place in nature. The relationship between man and animal had changed as meat is added to the food choices of man. God placed fear and terror within the animals for their protection as man sought to kill them for food. "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you" (Genesis 9: 3 KJV). This dominion over the animal kingdom did not permit killing to be unrestricted.

### Opportunities to Trust, Genesis 9: 8-13

Speaking of a word picture, the rainbow is another beautiful

vision as God sealed his covenant with Noah, his family and all living creatures. God had provided man a new beginning — an opportunity for complete trust and faith. God's covenant was an unequal agreement, one sided transaction as well as a continuation of the covenant with Noah upon entering the ark Genesis 6: 18. The covenant could never be equal. For God is superior, supreme, greater than man or animal. Through the divine proclamation of the covenant, God's gift of unmerited grace has continued to bless mankind. The flood that destroyed all living creatures, outside the ark was a unique one-time event that would never occur again. The rainbow in the cloud was the ratification of the covenant as God said "it shall be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth" (Genesis 9:13 KJV).

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**Record**

# Baptist Global Response now mobilizing across world

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — The creation of Baptist Global Response should go a long way toward improving Southern Baptists' ability to respond quickly in time of disaster, the organization's executive director Jeff Palmer said.

"This may be the first time Southern Baptists have had an organization that can provide a highly focused and coordinated response to relief and development needs overseas," said Palmer, who directed both the Mindanao Rural Life Center in the Philippines and the Asian Rural Life Development Foundation in Thailand.

"Baptist Global Response seeks to mobilize Southern Baptists' influence, prayer and human and financial resources to meet acute needs like earthquake or hurricane relief."

The organization's focus, however, is far more than just disaster relief, Palmer added.

"Baptist Global Response also focuses on chronic needs like generational poverty and hunger or endemic disease," he said. "We respond to people with critical long-term needs to give them the opportunity to experience lives filled with hope and peace, lives in which they can raise their families in confidence, build their communities with dignity and share with others how to have full and meaningful lives."

Baptist Global Response was incorporated in late 2006 by Southern Baptist leaders who have a heart for development and relief work, Palmer said. The seven-member board of directors is drawn from different walks of life, including key leaders like Southern Baptist Convention President Frank Page and longtime development workers like Harold Watson.

While the organization isn't an official entity of the

Southern Baptist Convention, its board members are all Southern Baptists.

"The International Mission Board has contracted Baptist Global Response as its '21st century partner' for international relief and development," Palmer said. "Baptist Global Response will administer general relief and Southern Baptist world hunger funds on projects conducted in partnership between Baptist Global Response and International Mission Board field personnel and stateside leaders like the disaster relief directors in Baptist state conventions."

Baptist Global Response is headquartered in Singapore, where a good communications infrastructure, excellent banking services and superior travel connections make quick response to disaster much easier, Palmer said. Since Asia is home to two-thirds of the world's population — and much of the globe's acute and chronic human needs — Singapore made sense as a home base.

A stateside liaison office is located in Nashville.

Operating funds have been provided by a grant from a donor and initial staffing is being kept to a minimum, Palmer said. The organization has area directors for five regions: Asia Rim, Central and South Asia, Europe and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Americas.

Palmer was appointed as executive director by the group's board of directors and the stateside office is led by Jim Brown, former director of the International Mission Board's world hunger and relief ministries office.

"Baptist Global Response seeks to coordinate the global resources of Southern Baptists in response to natural disasters, catastrophic crises and chronic



**HELPING HAND** — International Mission Board (IMB) missionary Ted Ortigo (right) works alongside Peruvian believers and other IMB missionaries to clear away rubble outside their base camp in Ica. The relief teams are putting in long hours as they unload and distribute supplies for survivors of the Aug. 15 earthquake. (BP photo)

humanitarian needs outside the United States and Canada," said Brown. "We intend to connect people in need with people who care."

"The people in need are those suffering from acute problems such as disasters, wars, epidemics and the like, as well as chronic problems like extreme poverty, hunger and poor health," Brown said. "The people who care are Southern Baptists who want to help make a difference in the lives of needy people worldwide."

Baptist Global Response will work internationally alongside overseas Baptist partners. In the U.S., it will principally work with Baptist state conventions,

associations, churches, and individuals to train and equip Southern Baptists for relief and development work, Brown said.

Through reports on the progress of development and relief projects, Baptist Global Response intends to give Southern Baptists an opportunity to celebrate what they are doing throughout the world to help the poor, needy, and suffering.

One of the key tools for mobilizing Southern Baptist resources is BGR AlertNet, a communications network intended to deliver information about disaster relief needs as soon as possible after a crisis emerges, Brown said.

Initially, the network uses e-mail to communicate with key leaders and media, but a blog will soon be added to the organization's Internet site, [www.gobgr.org](http://www.gobgr.org).

One impetus for creating Baptist Global Response is the growing awareness among Southern Baptists about critical human needs and an increasing desire to help, Palmer said.

"In the recent past, there has been a significant refocusing on human needs around the world due to acute problems such as tsunamis, earthquakes and fires. There also has been more and more awareness of chronic problems such as poverty, AIDS and hunger," Palmer said. "There is a greater overall sense that Southern Baptists are truly people who care and they want to make more and more of a difference in a needy world."

"The result is that Baptist Global Response is working on ways to respond quickly and effectively to international relief and development needs," Palmer said. "Part of that is a more rapid dissemination of information and another part is

a better coordinated effort for Southern Baptists.

"We have on our team some of the best folks I know of in Southern Baptist life to address relief and development needs," he added. "This organization has a quality team with many years of experience in both international relief and development."

"Our main strength, however, will be seen as 16 million Southern Baptists are able to demonstrate more effectively than ever that they are people who care about people in need."

Tommy Puckett, the Alabama Baptist Convention's director of men's ministries and disaster relief, affirmed the launch of Baptist Global Response, noting, "When a disaster takes place, you need knowledgeable people on the scene who can quickly assess the situation, know what kind of response is needed and know who is in the best situation to help."

"In disaster response, speed is of essence," Puckett said. "You need someone who has a panoramic view of the disaster who already knows how to work with government officials and what needs to be in place when volunteers come in to help."

Southern Baptist missionaries are a valuable asset in disaster response because they are on the scene almost everywhere disasters occur and can quickly respond, but the mechanism can be cumbersome, Puckett said. Relief efforts sometimes depend on missionaries who have little experience in disaster relief, he pointed out, and responses can be stymied at times by the complexity of relationships between local, state, national, and international organizations.

For more information on Baptist Global Response, visit [gobgr.org](http://gobgr.org).



**DESPERATE CITIZENS** — Thousands of Bangladeshis queue for much-needed emergency supplies after massive flooding in Dhaka wiped out crops and other food sources. Southern Baptists have been at the forefront of providing aid to the disaster victims in that country. (BP photo)